
SECTORAL AND CAREER PREFERENCES OF ACCOUNTING STUDENTS: PREDISPOSING FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR CHOICES

PRINCE FAMOUS, I.
ADEBIMPE, O. U, (Mrs.)

&

ABIOLA, A. (Mrs.)

College of Business and Social Sciences, Covenant University, Nigeria.

Abstract

Accounting students are usually faced with career choices after graduation. They also have to choose alongside a particular economic sector of their preference. These choices are usually influenced by various factors, which can either be psychological, economical, social, or environmental. This study empirically examined the career and sectoral preferences of final year accounting students in Nigeria. The predisposing factors influencing these choices were also highlighted.

Questionnaires were administered to a sample of 488 respondents drawn from tertiary institutions in Nigeria. From our data analysis and findings, we observed that most respondents are willing to work as financial accountants in the private sector preferably in the oil industry. The principal reason is high remuneration package currently obtainable in this particular sector.

INTRODUCTION

During the post-colonial era, between the early 1960s and late 1970s. Nigerian professionals most especially Accountants who were foreign trained and very few in number were highly regarded and respected by the society and highly demanded by business organisations. At that time, the living standard of an average professional accountant was quite high. For instance, they were highly paid in any sector of the economy of their choice and enjoyed good conditions of service as well. In the early 1980s the economy began to witness a drastic downturn and many businesses were liquidated. In addition there was this phenomenal venality of high level official corruption in government ministries, parastatals and government agencies. Other socio-economic causes accomplished the economic downturn and incessant military interruption in the governance of the country further compounded this adverse situation.

For instance, crime rate increased, graduate unemployment rate shot up. The hope of an average Nigerian was dashed because of weak and slow pace of government intervention and actions. Some people began to crave for ways of making quick money in and out of the country. One effect of the rising level of unemployment among tertiary institution graduates was a paradigm shift in the demand for career placement in the University admission. This shift precipitated by those seeking University admission to some choice disciplines was an attempt to boost their employability and create career path.

Career can be seen as a lifetime affair. There must be a right choice of career and employment where a person is best suited. People generally work for various reasons which could range from economic to social. There are obviously certain predisposing factors that could account for these choices. Some of these factors include personality, traits, needs, self-concept, talent, gender, child-parent relationship amongst others.

The primary aim of this study is to empirically identify the current sectoral and career

preferences of Nigerian accounting students in tertiary institutions and to ascertain the predisposing factors responsible for these choices or preferences.

The first section of this paper, presents the background of the study. Section two shows the research methodology adopted. Section three presents the data analysis and results while section four discusses the implication of findings and conclusion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Career as defined by Berz and Fitzgerald (1987) is an individual's paid employment outside the home. In the Advanced Learners dictionary, Career is defined as the series of jobs that a person has in a particular area of work, usually involving more responsibility as time passes. The word career is a term with different connotations to many theorists. Some confine the term to a single vocation while some others see it as sequence of jobs, occupations and position held during a lifetime. For instance, Super(1976) defined career to be the sequence of major positions occupied by a person throughout his pre-occupational, occupational and post occupational life, including work related roles . Taking these various views into consideration, career can be seen to be the work and the positions a person occupy during his/her lifetime.

Several earlier theorists try to explain the congruence between career choice and the individual concerned. Parsons (1909) advocates in his trait and factor theory that psychology of individual differences as well as different characteristics affect career. Individuals differ in aptitudes, abilities, interest and idiosyncrasies and career require varying degree of traits and factors.

Parson further explicated a three-step process through which an individual goes in choosing a career. The process presupposes that an individual compares his capacities and dispositions with those demanded by different career, and then selects the one which best suits him. The processes include:

- A clear understanding of himself, his aptitudes, ambitions, abilities, limitations, interests and resources.
- A good knowledge of the conditions and requirements of service, merits and demerits, compensation opportunities and prospect .in the various lines of work.
- Sound reasoning on the relation of the above two groups of factors and selecting a good match.

He noted that the more compatible the individual's potentials and the demands of occupation, the greater the probability of job success. On the other hand the less the match, the more the individual's frustration and dissatisfaction on the job. The merit of this theory, lies in its objectivity, logicity and common sense.

On the contrary, Super(1957) contends that individual abilities, aptitudes, interest and ambitions do not remain static and career information can hardly be factual. On the other hand, he also took into recognition the changes that people go through as they mature. He suggests that career choice is developmental in nature rather than being an event.

Super proposed that people differs in their abilities, traits, needs, interest, values and self-concept. The nature of the career pattern is determined by these attributes. The process of career development is essentially that of developing and implementing occupational self-concept. The degree of satisfaction people attain from work is proportional to that which they have been able to implement self-concepts. According to Super, self-concept formation requires the person to recognize himself as a distinctive individual, yet at the same time to be aware of the similarities between himself and others. Zunker (1990) opines that Super's theory is highly systematic and useful for developing strategies for career counseling programmes. Gottfredson(1996) in support of Super's theory suggested that people generally seek jobs that tally with their self-concept. He stressed that the key

determinants of self-concept are social class, experiences and level of intelligence. It has many elements which include appearance, abilities, personality, gender and place in society. Nusbaum (1977) sees the choice of occupation from a similar perspective. According to him "man's selection of work is a means of implementation of self-concept and identity which has reciprocal relationship with the environment".

Holland (1985) based his own theory narrowly on personality. His view is that people choose careers that are reflected of their personalities. He emphasized that people can function, develop best and find job satisfaction in a work environment that matches their personalities. Roe (1956) needs theory focuses attention on the early life experiences within the family and their subsequent effects on career motives and choice. The theory stresses that differences in personality, intelligence, and background affects career choice. It emphasizes that certain factors in an individual early socialization influence his career motives and choice. Of these factors, parental attitude plays some dominant roles.

From this theory, Ann Roe concludes that occupations are of two categories viz: person and non-person oriented occupations. Examples of the former are service, managerial arts and entertainment occupations, while the non-person oriented occupations are science and technology occupations. Roe later came up with the following hypotheses on the effect of the child-parent relationship on occupational choice.

- (1) That loving, protecting and demanding homes would lead to person oriented in the child and later person-orientation in occupations.
- (2) That rejecting, neglecting and casual homes would lead to non-person orientation in occupations.
- (3) That some individuals from rejected homes might become person oriented for personal satisfaction.

For instance Ben(1953) observed that the influence of mothers, sex, role ideology and occupational knowledge have impact on the employment preference of adolescents. He discovered that mothers influence the careers of their daughters. Beecher (1953) from the same perspective maintained that married women for example teach because of the condition of service the profession gives them in terms of enormous time for their homes. They can easily combine their roles of mothers and teaching. Okedeji(1973) shared a similar point of view with Ben and Beecher, but observed that women prefers certain jobs like nursing or teaching because they are feminine occupations which are not too demanding. He cited that women opt for careers that are not too demanding. This view is quite contradictory with what is currently happening in the accountancy profession. Nowadays, there are increasing number of females in this profession despite the fact that the profession is highly demanding.

Hillman (1977) observed that personal background matters, such as the perception of parents occupation. He also opined that peer group and the mass media could as well influence students choice of a career such as Medicine, Law or Accounting e.t.c. Also from the parental point of view Smith et al (1969) in their research observed that parents do influence the choice of occupation of their children. They concluded that female children yield to the influence of their parents more than the male. This view appears to be in line with Thomas (1978) whose observation was purely drawn from sex point of view. He claimed that sex has influence on the choice of career and occupation.

Another prominent researcher, Oyeboode(1980) in a paper presented at the Nigeria Psychological Society Conference held between 6TH and 9TH February, 1980 at the University of Lagos, stated that children aspire to the jobs that are highly rated in the society. Before this time, Hicks (1972) has shown that the employment preference of the students is influenced by certain reward-oriented values. He believes that prestige is a composite of money earned by the job in addition to some other factors.

On the Internet, accountingwebus.com an accounting website of Accounting web incorporation, United States of America, published an article on June 10,2002 titled, "Student Perspectives on the Accounting Profession". In this article a study was conducted and several conclusions were drawn on the factors that influence their decisions on career paths. Amongst others are (a) confidence in finding a job (b) long term commitment to an employer (c) flexible schedules (d) salary expectations (e) partnership desires (f) perception of Big Five versus regional and local firms and (g) geographic perception

From the foregoing, it is clear that the concept of career choice and employment preference is predominantly dependent on various factors, ranging from psychological to non-psychological as gleaned from various literature. The factors include needs, traits, self-concept, personality, sex talent, interest, passion and parental influence amongst others. This current Nigerian study attempts to identify those predisposing factors for career and sectoral preferences amongst accounting students in selected Universities in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study essentially focused on the preference of the final year accounting students on their choice of career. A total of 730 questionnaires were administered directly to full-time and part-time final year students from the three leading first generation Universities offering accounting programmes in Nigeria during the 1999/2000 session.

The institutions include:

- 1 University of Benin, Benin (UNIBEN)
- 2 University of Lagos, Lagos (UNILAG)
- 3 Obafemi Awolowo University(OAU)

SAMPLING FRAMEWORK

The selection of the respondents was purely through purposive approach but under the general framework of stratified sampling technique. In this respect, each University was regarded as a stratum and questionnaires were then administered to the final year students accounting majors drawn from the three (3) strata. The next section presents data analysis and results.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A total of 730 questionnaires were sent to respondents but only 488 (68%) were returned. Analysis of data in the study is therefore based on the 68% of the questionnaires response rate. And of this response rate, 55% were male respondents while the remaining 45% were female respondents. The reason for this disparity is that accounting has been a male dominated career in Nigeria.

Table 1: AGE CLASSIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS.

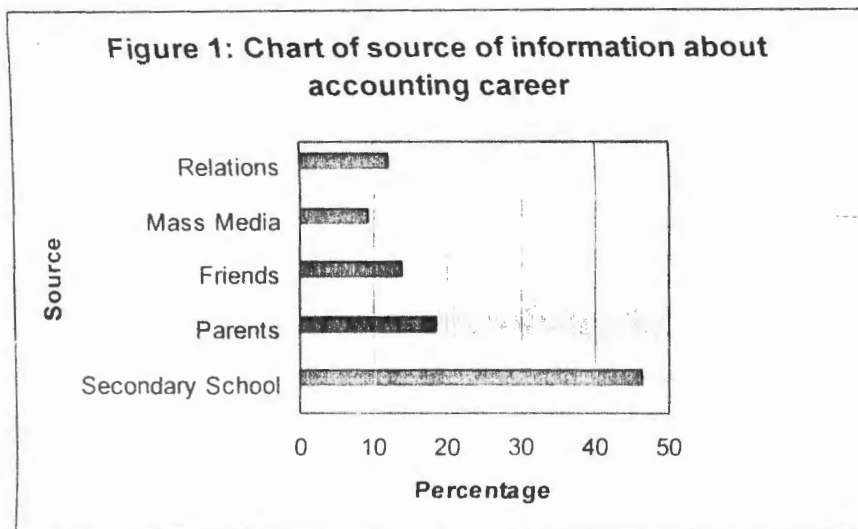
Age Interval	Respondents	Percentage(%)
18-22	80	16.39
23-27	254	52.05
28-32	72	14.75
33-37	26	5.33
37-Above	56	11.48
Total	488	100.00

The Table 1 above shows that 16.39%% of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 22, while 52.05% are between 23 and 27 years. 14.75% are between 28 and 32 years, *Review of Business and Finance Volume 4 No 1. Jan – June 2002*

5.33% are of the range 33 to 37 years. Similarly 11.48% are of 37 years and above. It is observed that the respondents mainly fall between 23 and 27 years of age. The implication of this result is that majority of the accounting students make their career choices between the ages of 23 and 27 years. Age has a lot to play in the choice of a career. Relatively young persons are more influenced and are also more capable of shifting their preferences depending on the source and potency of such influences.

Table 2: SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT ACCOUNTING AS A CAREER

Source	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Secondary School	226	46.30
Parents	90	18.52
Friends	68	13.88
Mass Media	45	9.26
Relations	59	12.04
Total	488	100



From Table 2 and figure 1 it is highly indicative that most of the respondents (46.30%) obtained information about accounting career from secondary school counsellors, while 18.52% claimed to have obtained the same information from their parents. On the other hand, 13.88% of them got the information from friends. 9.26% from the mass media and 12.04% claimed to get the information from close relations. The possible reason that might have accounted for a majority obtaining the information from secondary school is because most secondary schools organize career talks for their students.

Table 3: REASON FOR CAREER CHOICE

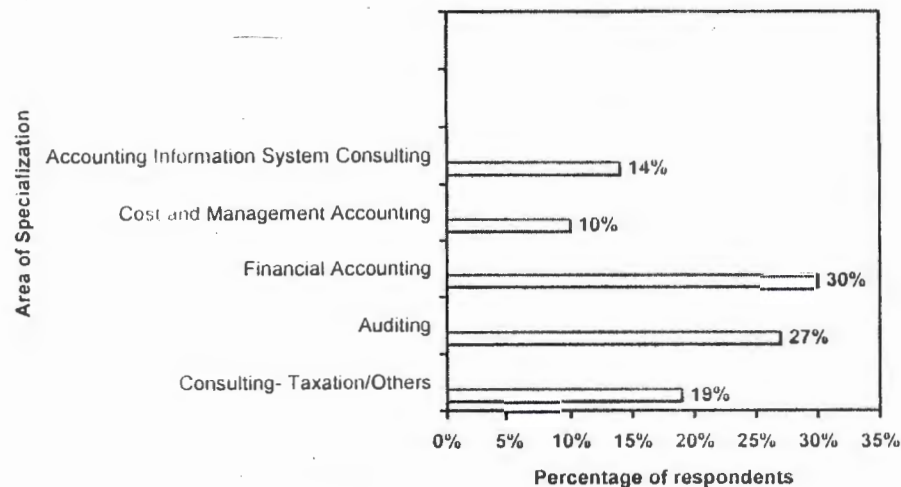
Reasons	Yes		No		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Family ties	64	13.11	424	86.89	488	100
Economic reason	411	84.22	77	15.78	488	100
Friends/peer influence	128	26.23	360	73.77	488	100
Parents' employment	96	19.67	392	80.33	488	100
Parental influence/guidance	64	13.11	424	86.89	488	100
Other Opportunity	193	39.55	295	60.45	488	100

The reason for career choice profile as presented in Table 3 above shows that, 13.11% of the respondents were influenced by family ties in their choice of career, 84.22% were influenced by economic gains and 26.23% were motivated by friends or peers influence. It can also be seen that 19.67% were influenced by one of the parents' employment and 13.11% of the respondents claimed to be influenced by their parental guidance/instruction. Similarly 39.55% were influenced by other opportunities that may avail itself in the career. It can be seen that most of the reasons for career choice skew more favourably toward economic gains.

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION IN ACCOUNTING

Figure 2 below depicts the intended area of specialization in accounting by the respondents after graduation. For instance, 19% of the respondents would like to specialize as Consultants (Taxation and other related services), 27% prefers to specialize in auditing, 30% of respondents prefer to specialize in Financial accounting services, while 10% of them prefer to specialize in Cost and Management Accounting with their eyes on the manufacturing subsector, Only 14% prefer Accounting and Information technology. This group intend to major in the knowledge based subsector. It can be seen on the chart that majority of the respondents are willing to specialize as Financial accountants. This can be partially due to the reason indicated in Table 3 above. Most of the respondents prefer to work in the Bank and Oil sectors where they hoped that they will be well remunerated.

Figure 2: Chart depicting the respondents intended area of specialization in Accounting



ECONOMIC SECTOR PREFERENCE

In figure 3 below, it is observed that most of the respondents that is (70%) prefer to work in the private sector. 14% would prefer to work in the public sector and only 10% wants to be self-employed. Instructively, only 6% wants to go to the academics. This rather low interest in going into the academic profession may have an adverse effect on the educational system in future. There would be less tutors and researchers in this field because most of the students prefer to work in the private sector for economic reasons as already summarized in Table 3.

Figure 3: Chart depicting the employment sector preferred by respondents.

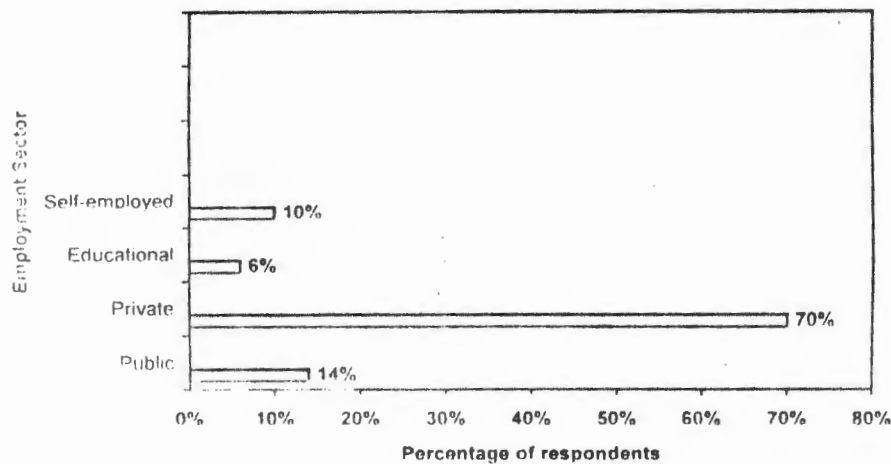
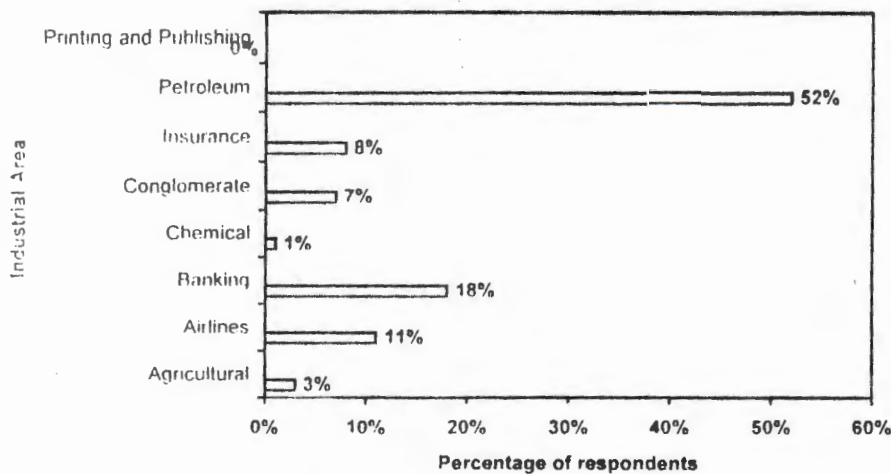


Figure 4: Chart showing the Industrial Area respondents are willing to be employed



As shown in figure 4 above it is obvious that most respondents (52%) prefer to work in the Petroleum sector, 18% prefer Banking sector, Airlines 11%, Insurance 8%, Conglomerate 7%, Agricultural 3%, Chemical, 1%, Printing and Publishing, 0%. From the observation, most of the respondents prefer to work in the Oil Sector. This can be traced to the high remuneration package that is obtained in this industry.

Table 5: Determinants of Career Choice for Private and Public Sectors

	Private Sector		Public Sector		Total Response	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Remuneration	439	90	49	10	488	100
Job Security	98	20	390	80	488	100
Fringe Benefits	361	74	127	26	488	100

The Table 5 above reveals the determinants of the respondents career choice for either public or private sector. Those who preferred to work in the private sector do so purely for remuneration and fringe benefits reasons, this being rated as 90% and 74% respectively. And those accounting undergraduates whose career preference is in the Public sector do so primarily for job security reasons and are rated as 80% of the respondents. Business enterprises in the private sector reward their staff in terms of higher remuneration and fringe benefits than the public sector. But private sector operators care less about job security, some of them operate the 'use-and-dump' technique. They are essentially after the service an employee can render now and do not care about the employee's future. Some of the respondents were interviewed to know why almost all of them craved for remuneration. The main reasons such as maintenance of dependent relatives, maintenance of high standard of living, investments, prestige, self actualization and positive contribution to the society were cited by them.

Figure 6: Chart analyzing the extent to which job security influence the respondents choice of employment

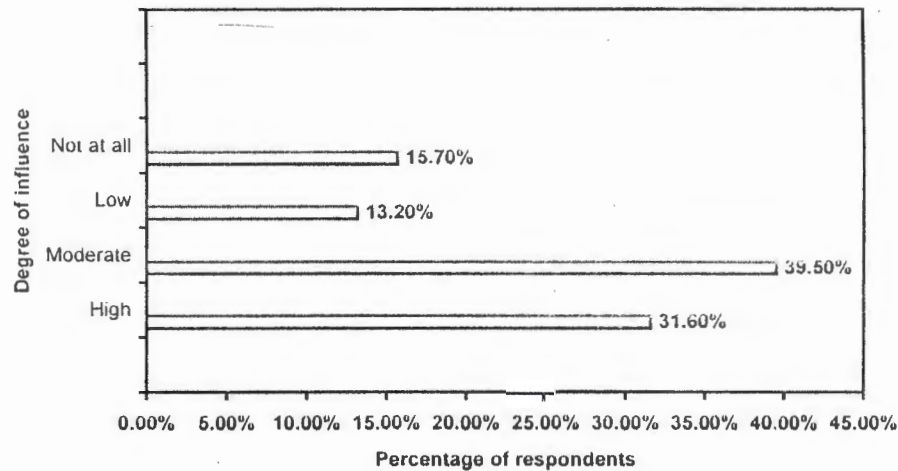


Figure 5: Chart analyzing the extent to which remuneration influence the respondents choice of employment

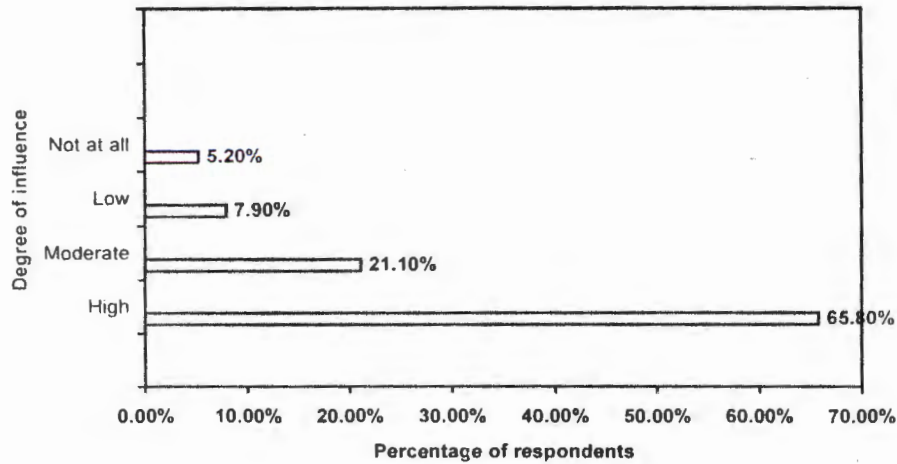
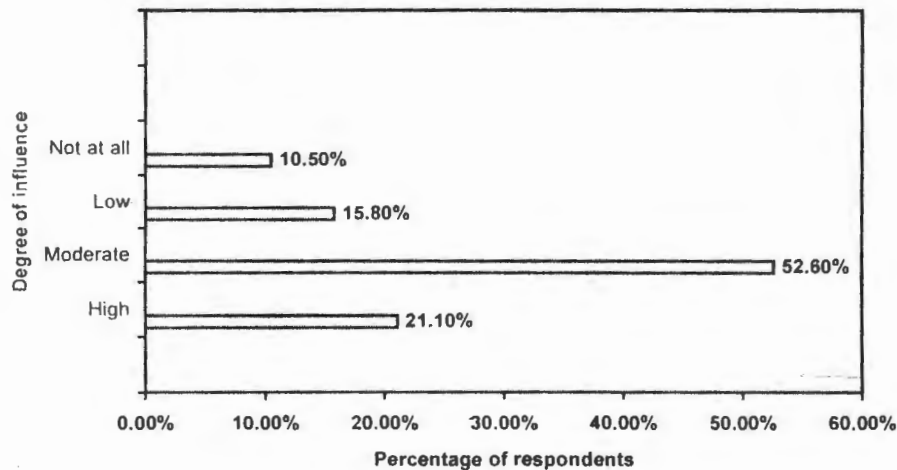


Figure 7: Chart analyzing the extent to which fringe benefits influence the respondents choice of employment



Figures 5, 6, and 7 above reveal the extent to which career determinants (remuneration, job security, fringe benefits) influence the respondents choice of employment and sectoral preferences. These determinants were individually considered below.

REMUNERATION

It is not surprising to see in figure 5 that 65.80% of the respondents were highly influenced and 21.10% moderately influenced by remuneration factor. Only 7.90% and 5.20% are slightly or not influenced at all by remuneration. This tends to support the argument that the heart of every average Nigerian young accounting graduate is largely influenced by economic gains. Employers can use such factor as motivation device to attract and retain

them.

JOB SECURITY

Job security is also crucial in the life of every fresh accounting graduate. The analysis in figure 6 buttresses this fact because 31.60% stated that they would be highly influenced by job security, while 39.50% believe they would be moderately influenced by job security. Only 13.2% of the respondents are of the opinion that they would be slightly influenced while 15.70% of the respondents feel they would not be influenced by job security at all.

FRINGE BENEFITS

This determinant is moderately expected by the respondents. Figure 7 indicates that 52.60% are moderately influenced by fringe benefit factor, while 21.10% claimed that they would be highly influenced by fringe benefits. Only 15.80% believe they would be slightly influenced and 10.50% are of the view they would not be influenced by this factor at all.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

Most accounting graduates or students in the study got information about their career at secondary schools, and also from parents, friends, mass media and relations.

Economic gains largely contributes to the choice of their career and sector. Parental guidance, instructions and employment have a little or no effect in their choice of career and sector. Most accounting students involved in this study were willing to specialize mostly in rendering financial accounting services after graduation. Remuneration is a very strong predisposing factor in their choice of career. Reasons they advanced for this are:

- Maintenance of high standard of living
- Maintenance of dependant relatives
- Investment purposes
- Self actualization
- Prestige
- Positive contribution to the society.

The above findings were in tandem with the USA study revealed in our literature review. Most of the respondents prefer to be employed in the private sector largely for the attractive remuneration and fringe benefits purposes. A small number were however influenced to work in public sector primarily for job security while a fewer of them prefer to go into academics.

In terms of sectoral preference, most accounting students prefer the oil and banking industrial sector because of the good working conditions and packages offered to employees in these sector.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The society largely influences its youths. A society whose taste has become highly materialistic will invariably produce such graduates whose desire or unbridled propensity will skew towards economic materialism and hedonism. Hence hardwork, integrity, professional prestige and service will have been relegated to the background. Money seems to have topped the list of career preference scale among the students in the accounting discipline which were involved in this study. There is the urgent need for the Government, the accountancy bodies, and the accounting institutions to re-orientate the students and order their life focus. If this is not addressed from the onset the nation will be facing a serious ethical dilemma in future.

Similarly a situation where very few accounting students indicate interest in the teaching profession, portends a very serious danger especially in the production of

graduates in our tertiary institutions. The number of candidates seeking for placement into Accounting Department in tertiary institutions every year has far outnumbered other management and social science courses. Yet little attention is paid to those who are academically and professionally qualified, who seek for teaching positions in these institutions. The non-discriminating remuneration has not helped the matter either. Due recognition has not been given to professionals in terms of key economic relevance of the discipline. Demand should dictate the price, in this case of remuneration of accounting teachers. There is a high demand for accounting degree in Universities but there are fewer qualified teachers to produce the sound graduates that can be useful in the industries, government establishments and tertiary institutions in the country. An enabling condition of rewards for accountants in the tertiary and secondary educational institutions should be worked out to encourage qualified accountants to remain in teaching. This will stem brain drains from the academic institutions to the more rewarding industries. Besides, funding of researches in accounting field should be encouraged by the industry and the Institutes of Chartered Accountant bodies.

CONCLUSION

From the study we observed that most accounting students are drawn into accounting profession largely for economic gains. They believe accounting is a "get rich quick" profession, they seem not to be concerned about the job security for now but are more concerned with immediate economic rewards.

Most accounting students according to the study, prefers working in the private sector, most especially in the oil and banking industrial sectors, where they can always take home fat remuneration packages. The students considered remuneration as a paramount factor in the determination of their employment and career choices. Only negligible number wants to go into the teaching profession. This rather low interest may have an adverse effect on the educational system and hence the accountancy practice in future.

REFERENCES

- Accounting Web US.com(2002) "Students perception on the Accounting Profession" *Internet*, June 2002.
- BETZ, N.E and *The Career Psychology of Women*, Orlando, FITZGERALD, L.F. (1987) Academic Press.
- GOTTFREDSON, L.S.(1996) *Career Choice and Development* Jossey-Bass San Francisco pp 179-232.
- HICKS, R. E.(1972) *Occupational Prestige ant its Factors*, African Social Resources, pp 41-48
- HORNBY, A.S. *Advanced Learners Dictionary*, 6th edition, Oxford
- NUSBAUM, G.R(1977) *Self- Managed Career Development, A Behaviour Humanism Approach*, Dissertation Abstract International November, 1977 vol.xxxvii No 5,pp 2562a
- OKEDEJI, P.A,(1973) "Motivational, Racial Socio-economic Correlates of Occupational Aspiration", *West African Journal*, February, 1973 vol 17 No 1
- PARSONS , F. (1909) *Choosing a Vocation*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company.
- ROE, A. (1956) *The Psychology of Occupations*, New York: Wiley

VOL. 1, NO. 1, 2004